

## ADDRESS

Braunstone Gate Bridge, LEICESTER

Parish LEICESTER  
District LEICESTER  
County LEICESTERSHIRE

Case UID: 167779

Date First Listed:

Formerly Listed As:

## RECOMMENDATION

Adviser: Dr C Skinner

Outcome: No, do not list

Recommended Grade: NL

11-AUG-2009

Advice Text: After examining all the papers on this file and other relevant information and having carefully considered the architectural and historic interest of this case, the criteria for listing are not fulfilled.

## CONTEXT

An application to list Braunstone Gate Railway Bridge has been received. Leicester City Council has agreed to dispose of their freehold interest in the Bridge and the land to the north to De Montfort University. The university's proposal for the site involves demolition of the bridge for the development of a sports complex. Demolition is expected to proceed on 21st September 2009 or thereabouts. This case has created a high level of public interest and concern.

## HISTORY

Braunstone Gate Bridge was built as part of the Great Central Railway between 1896 and 1899. The main line opened to goods traffic on 25th July 1898 and to passengers on 15th March 1899. This stretch of line, between London and Annesley, continued as an important part of the nation's transport system until the 1950s. Leicester Central Station closed in May 1969 and with it came the gradual decline of this section of the route. Part of the line was purchased by Leicester City Council and was developed as a cycle track. This included the Braunstone Gate Bridge but due to concern for public safety the route of the cycle track was diverted to ground level and the bridge was closed in 2000. A Bridge Inspection Report was undertaken in April 2005 which concluded that the bridge was in extremely poor condition, in an advanced state of deterioration and unsafe for use due to corrosion to a number of important sections.

The construction of the line was recorded in detail by Leicester-based Sydney Walter Alfred Newton, a photographer whose family had run a lucrative photographic business in the city during the late C19. This work resulted in 5000 glass plate negatives recording the construction of the line as well as the social history of the navvies. Such an archive provides an additional dimension to the local social interest of the bridge and of the line as a whole.

## DESCRIPTION

The bridge is a lattice-girder, skew span bridge, built of mild steel with a steel tensile strength of 27-30 tons per square inch. The girders are unequal in size, the larger, to the north, is 178ft 3in long by 19 feet deep at the centre, and weighs 126 tons. The smaller is 135ft long, 19 feet deep at the centre and weighs 72 tons. These are described as the longest and heaviest main girders on this section of the railway and carry the railway over the River Soar and Western Boulevard. A large temporary stage had to be erected and special precautions taken when the Braunstone Gate

Bridge was constructed to avoid putting any extra weight on the bridge below, which carries the road over the River Soar.

## ASSESSMENT

The English Heritage Selection Guide for listing Transport structures states that bridges which date to before 1840 and survive intact will warrant serious consideration for listing. Considerable selectivity is required for those built after this date and these need to be considered in the context of the mode of transport for which they were built. In this instance, the Braunstone Gate Bridge was built by the Great Central Railway which falls into the fourth and final phase of railway development (1870 - 1914) and as a consequence is considered late in date in the context of the development of the national railway network.

The explosion of railway projects in the late Victorian period created the need for standardised and less spectacular bridges. The theory and practice of masonry bridge technology was marked by a high point in the C18. However, increasing demand from developing transport networks required quicker solutions. Arched iron bridges were widely adopted in the early-nineteenth century but a series of failures rendered cast iron risky for major spans after 1847 (although many smaller and ornamental bridges continued to be built). Engineers turned more to metal truss bridges from the 1820s and suspension bridges (Telford's over the Menai Straits of 1826 was among the earliest). Concrete for bridges was used from the late nineteenth century. The first major use of steel in British bridges is the Forth Bridge (1890) and it came to predominate in the late nineteenth and twentieth century in the form of box girder and suspension bridges.

Braunstone Gate Bridge is a relatively early example of the use of steel in the context of railway bridges. However, given the successful use of steel in major projects such as the Forth Bridge in 1890, the use of steel became widespread and was commonly used by this period. In terms of the scale of construction, an article in Fielden's Magazine in 1900 states that the girders used in the construction of Braunstone Gate Bridge were the longest and heaviest main girders installed on this section of the railway. In a national context the Severn Railway Bridge built 20 years earlier included two spans each of 327 feet. This has since been demolished but the Wear Railway Bridge at Sunderland; with a span of 300 feet is one of the longest surviving examples. The skew span of the bridge required the girders to be unequal in length so as to cross the angle of the River Soar and road below. During construction a large temporary stage was erected to avoid putting any extra weight on the bridge below, which carries the road over the River Soar. It has been claimed that this was an extraordinary method of construction but notes from Fielden's Magazine of 1900 state that 'the works were of the usual type' for the time.

The construction of the Great Central Railway, of which this bridge formed a part, was a substantial undertaking, involving as it did cutting through the centres of Nottingham, Leicester and other major towns. It was not however more complicated in architectural or constructional terms than other stretches of railway and did not break new ground in these respects.

Clearly the bridge is of considerable local interest and offers a landmark in the urban landscape of Leicester. This interest is heightened by the archives created by Sydney Walter Alfred Newton and the association he brings between the recording of the Great Central Line as a whole and the local link of his birth place and the bridge itself. Due to its construction late in the period of railway building and because the construction method employed was not innovative for the period, the Braunstone Gate Bridge does not meet the criteria for designation in the national context.

## SOURCES

Fielden's Magazine, Vol No. 1, August - December 1900, pp472

Bidder, F. W, (M.Inst. CE) Minutes of the Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers, Vol: CXLII, 1899-1900 session, Paper No.3227, 20th March 1900

Conclusion: The Braunstone Gate Bridge does not meet the necessary criteria for designation in a national context.

Reasons For Designation Decision:

Braunstone Gate Bridge is not recommended for designation for the following principle reasons:

- \* Although a monumental landmark the bridge is not of sufficient architectural or historical significance in a national context.
- \* The Bridge is not an innovative example of this type of steel construction. Large numbers were built over England at this time.
- \* Braunstone Gate bridge is very late in the context of Railway development nationally.

## VISITS

## COUNTERSIGNING

First Countersigning Adviser: Mr R Hawkins

Comments: Agreed, no do not list.

This bridge, although visually prominent, is of relatively late date in the context of the development of the national rail network, and is of a standard constructional form, although here deployed to span a problematic alignment of road and watercourse. The use of steel for bridge construction was by this time not unusual. There is considerable local interest in this bridge, but it lacks the level of special interest in a national context to justify a listing recommendation.

12-August-2009.

Second Countersigning Adviser:

Comments:

HP Director:

Comments:

